



## design + decor

BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN

After a long Maine winter, it's liberating to change things up a bit. In addition to the rudimentary spring cleaning, why not take the opportunity to make some bold changes? I've interviewed two business owners who have a knack for design and decor and have graciously shared their ideas—from the simple to the sublime. In each case, there's surely a bit of practice-makes-perfect as they are constantly changing displays and inventory in their shops to keep things interesting.

Donna Lacey Derstine has a flair for nature-inspired decor. It's her way of bringing the outdoors in. Step into her shop, Scout, on Main Street in Bridgton and you'll get it immediately.

"I carry these oversized pasture prints, which fill a wall with soft, subtle shades. I also love to use botanical fern and floral prints to brighten a space. Last year, I had an old cement bird bath that I lined with moss and covered with a glass top. It became a beautiful side table."

It's a gift to be able to revision a functional object as a decorative element. Even if you consider yourself a visual person, it

takes a creative eye to see something in a different context altogether. Donna has that gift, as well as a keen sense of color, which she combines to create painted furniture and decor that is both inventive and appealing. She stops short of using color in a thematic way by throwing in a contrasting color or pattern that somehow brings the whole thing together. A muted palette of grey is accentuated with the pop of color provided by a red bowl or a brightly patterned pillow.

It's no surprise that Donna studied commercial art and was a pastel painter before she opened Scout and switched to painting furniture. As a designer, she approaches both individual pieces and overall spaces as blank canvases.

She likes to start with one item or area of the room and then layer around it, much as she would with a painting. For example, she'll begin with a focal point, such as an oversize sofa, and work her way down or up from there by layering artwork, side tables, etc. Throws and pillows are a fun and inexpensive way to add strokes of color.

In addition to incorporating color and layering into her decor, Donna is also big



on texture. Old wood, baskets and rugs all add dimension to a room. Even a monochromatic room becomes more nuanced with texture.

Asked to define her style, Donna uses the term eclectic.

“The problem for me is that I like many styles. As an artist, I see beauty and aesthetics in so many forms of decor.”

She adds, “I am still partial to a rustic, antique palette with a lot of pops of new or vintage, so that you still have a sense of old but with the freshness of new mixed in.”

For Julie Whelchel, who with her husband Rick, opened J. Decor on Main Hill in Bridgton four years ago, design is a way of life. The superb craftsmanship of the historic pharmacy they painstakingly restored to house J. Decor provided the perfect palette to showcase their years of home design experience, but it didn't stop there. As a natural extension to the shop, Julie offers custom design services that draw on her love of arts and crafts decor and vintage industrial furnishings and lighting.

For the DIY homeowner who wants to change things up, Julie has this advice.

“Begin any design project with an inspiration piece. I've had inspiration pieces range from a pillow whose pattern and color I absolutely loved, all the way to a gorgeous early English chifferobe. Anything can inspire. It's just important that it be something you truly love.”

She adds, “Once I know what piece my design is going to revolve around, I consider what color palette I'll work with. Choosing color, be it for walls, rugs, upholstered furniture, bedding or bath, can be a daunting task that too often results in a house full of rooms that don't talk to one another. I like to select one color that can be used throughout the home and then work complementary colors into each unique space so that when the project is complete, there is a unifying feel throughout.”

Dash & Albert rugs and wicker furniture are just two of Julie's favored decorative elements. Wicker is timeless in its appeal and somehow works with just about everything, which brings up an important point about home decor. The idea that you can only have one style present in your home is so '80s. If anything, the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction, to where salvaged cabinets soften the edges of an ultra-modern kitchen and a modern chair makes a dynamic companion to a Chippendale desk.

There are no hard and fast rules about



mixing styles, but you may want to play it safe by working with your two favorite styles and sticking to an 80/20 rule in the room. If, for example, your preference leans toward traditional, make it the dominant style and accent it with modern elements. The result will be decor that looks intentional, as opposed to haphazard.

With regard to her own home, Julie has this to add. “What makes my personal design approach unique is the fact that I love timeless styles and natural materials. Linen, hardwood, hand-crafted pieces and family heirlooms all have a place in my home. I chose quality items that will have a long life and acquire a patina over time, like real wicker furniture that, after seasons of use, molds to our bodies, or the kitchen farm table that has nicks and scrapes and wine rings from baking Christmas cookies and drinking wine with dear friends. Those pieces define our history.” ☀

